



Benjy Can't Do It All – A Story for *Parashat Yitro*

by Alan Levin

Benjy woke up on this typical Tuesday morning. He washed his face, brushed his teeth, combed his hair and got ready for school. He put on his jeans and T-shirt. He looked at himself in the mirror and smiled. Benjy was a good kid. In fact, he tried to be almost perfect. He wanted to please his teachers, his parents and his friends.

As he ran down the stairs, he saw his little sister preparing to take out the dog. Benjy grabbed the leash and said, "I'll take him." He thought Sarah was too little and the dog would get away. Returning to the kitchen, his mom asked what he would like for lunch, turkey or peanut butter and jelly. "I'll make it," he said. He wanted the peanut butter spread carefully to the ends of the bread and just a touch of jelly. If he had turkey he wanted two slices, not three, and no squishy tomato. He wanted perfect sandwiches, but did not want to insult his mom by giving her directions, so he just made his own lunch. After breakfast, his sister Sarah was "shlepping" the clean laundry up the stairs. Benjy took it from her so that she would not drop it and mess up the cloths.

Benjy jumped into his mom's SUV and off they went to school. Benjy did not know why they needed a gas guzzler that took up two parking spaces, but he did not have time now to worry about it.

His first class was social studies where they were working on reports. Benjy's group needed poster board, and Sam volunteered to pick it up after school. Benjy said he would get it instead. He was afraid it might get dirty or bent. He thought Sam was responsible, but not always very careful. At lunch, he met Tony who reminded him of their ball game the next day. Tony said, "We really need to win this one, so I will call the guys and remind them to come early for practice." Benjy told Tony not to think about it. He would call the guys. The day went on in the same way, with Benjy doing his work and volunteering to do extra things like take the gerbils home over vacation, pick up a carton in the library for his English teacher, and do research on gas efficiency of the new hybrid cars for science. He was sure he could do everything he volunteered to do.

After school, his Mom was waiting for him. He jumped in the SUV and began to rattle off the list of things he needed to do. "I need to stop at the art store to get poster board for social studies and after Hebrew school I need to call the guys on my ball team. Then, I need to do some computer research comparing the gas efficiency in cars. Then, I can eat dinner, do the rest of my homework and practice the piano, Mom." He paused for a breath looking sad and almost in tears, "I don't think I can do it all. I promised... Oh yeah," he added, "the gerbils from science class are coming home with me over vacation." His mom asked him if he needed to do it all. "Yes mom, I do. These are *my* responsibilities. I *promised*."



Arriving at Hebrew school, Benjy jumped out of the car and ran to class. His teacher began the lesson with, "Let's talk about this week's Torah portion. Remember, it is our job to see how Torah speaks to us and hear what it has to say about our lives. The portion this week is *Yitro*. In one part, Moses meets with his father-in-law Jethro. Moses has been sitting all day as a magistrate for the people, deciding between arguments and clarifying God's commandments. When his father-in-law sees all of the things Moses is doing for the people, he asks him what he is doing and why he is doing it all himself when people around him are doing nothing. He tells Moses that it is not right because the task is too heavy for him. He will wear himself out. Jethro tells Moses that he can not do it all alone, and he suggests a system for delegating authority."

Benjy listened to his teacher and the message from Torah. He realized that he could not do everything himself. He could entrust his sandwich to his mom. His sister would be careful with the dog and with the laundry. He could trust Sam to get the poster board and let Tony make some of the calls to the team.

Benjy learned from this Torah portion how to order his life and not feel that he needed to do everything alone. We can all learn from *Parashat Yitr*, and other Torah portions ways to relate to other people and bring order to our lives.